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BOOK REVIEWS AND NOTICES

The Instinct of Workmanship. By THORSTEIN B. VEBLEN. New York: MacMillan, 1914. 8vo, pp. 355. \$2.00.

Professor Thorstein Veblen holds a peculiar place among American economists. Coming early to the standpoint of modern evolutionary science, he has centered his whole attention upon those phenomena of institutional growth and change which orthodox economists have left on one side in order to study the fabled notions of the hedonistic man. Wherefore he has been a thorn in the flesh to his pre-Darwinian colleagues and an inspiration to those who would make of economics a modern science.

His latest work takes direct issue with an ancient and fundamental postulate of orthodox economics—that “aversion to labor” which was one of the two or three human traits allowed to the “economic man” by John Stuart Mill,¹ and which is the basis of labor-pain-cost theories of value. Professor Veblen pointed out some years ago that mankind is, on the contrary, endowed with a native “aversion to futility,” a “propensity to useful effort,” or an “instinct of workmanship,” and that the “aversion to labor,” which economists have been wont to regard as a primordial trait of human nature, is in fact a by-product of that institutional development which has created private property and a conspicuously leisured class.² This thesis he has now elaborated, tracing in outline the fortunes of this native propensity to useful effort as it has affected and been affected by the course of cultural growth.

The “instinct of workmanship,” in Professor Veblen’s conception, is not any one “combination of reflexes, responding in a determinate way to definite stimuli;³ but is, rather, an innately organized predisposition toward serviceable effort—serviceable with respect to ends which other instinctive dispositions make worth while.⁴ Like other instincts, that

¹ *Essays on Some Unsettled Questions of Political Economy*, 2d ed., pp. 137, 138.

² “The Instinct of Workmanship and the Irksomeness of Labor,” *American Journal of Sociology*, IV, 187-201; *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, pp. 15-16, 93, 176.

³ Cf. Parmalee, *The Science of Human Behavior*, p. 226.

⁴ If it be conceded that hereditary human nature does comprise organized dispositions of a “higher” or more complex kind than those which are resolvable into simple reflexes—and so much is conceded even by Dr. Parmalee (*loc. cit.*, pp. 245 ff., on

of workmanship also is adaptive, which is to say modifiable by habit, and so becomes the basis of institutions. The propensity in question is in this way the institutional taproot of technology as well as much of that matter-of-fact knowledge which underlies technology and which constitutes the most substantial achievement of mankind.

During the prolonged savagery of the race, when a high degree of group solidarity was indispensable to survival, the instinct of workmanship and the parental bent with which it is crossed and colored, received a bias favorable to the community's fulness of life. In the predatory culture which succeeded savagery, workmanship and parenthood were contaminated by emulation and the habit of invidious comparison so that serviceability came to be rated in terms of individual advantage. The same bent has been confirmed, albeit with lessened force and an altered direction, by the régime of private property and competition. But the ancient bias for the generically useful has never been wholly lost. Waste and social disserviceability still offend common-sense; self-seeking still finds it worth while to simulate altruism.

To students of economics, the interest of the present work will center in chaps. vi and vii, treating, respectively, of the era of handicraft and the machine industry. Chap. vii enlarges upon a thesis already stated in *The Theory of Business Enterprise*. The instinctive dispositions are adaptive, but the margin of toleration within which adaptation is feasible is much narrower than the possible variations of institutions. This margin of toleration appears already to be approached by the machine-made civilization of our time. The machine technology and the dispassionate sweep of mechanical causation which it presupposes are alien to the spiritual nature of man, formed by the discipline of untold generations which knew not the machine. Hence much of the prevalent discontent and cultural instability. The closing chapter also touches upon that persuasive view of capitalistic exploitation which was set forth more in length in the articles upon the "Nature of Capital."¹

The Instinct of Workmanship is complementary to much of Professor Veblen's earlier work. The standpoint and the method of analysis ("general innate tendencies")—then the quarrel between those who employ the term "instinct" in its wider and more popular sense and those who would restrict it to a neurological connotation, becomes a terminological matter. See critical note, *The Instinct of Workmanship*, p. 28.

Dr. Parmalee has, curiously enough, confused Professor Veblen's "instinct of workmanship" with the motives to (pecuniarily) gainful effort, which latter are mainly of conventional, rather than congenital, derivation (*loc. cit.* p. 252).

¹ *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, XXIII, 104.

are essentially the same as in *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, though still larger use is made of psychological and ethnological material. The style is not so brilliant as that of the last-mentioned work; there are no such memorable phrases as "conspicuous waste," "pecuniary emulation," or "invidious distinction," and there is distinctly less of that veiled satire of which the author is so great a master. The subject-matter also is less novel in that the main conceptions, though not their detailed working out, are familiar to readers of Professor Veblen's earlier books and articles. But the bringing together and working out of these conceptions constitute a substantial contribution to the understanding of the material civilization by and under which we live.

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MADISON, WIS.

General Economic History of the Dominion, 1867-1912. By OSCAR D. SKELTON. Toronto: Publishers' Association of Canada, Ltd., 1913. 4to, pp. 95-274.

This book is a reprint of a portion of one volume of a twenty-two volume set entitled *Canada and Its Provinces*, a work which plans to cover the history of the Canadian people, including their economic, social, and political institutions. It is prepared under the editorial direction of Adam Shortt and A. G. Doughty who have enlisted the aid of a hundred different contributors. The plans indicate that two volumes of the work are given to the industrial development of the Dominion, but nearly all of the other volumes devote at least some attention to that phase of Canadian history. Since the problems of currency, banking, public finance, and transportation are covered in other sections of this particular part, the section before us is devoted to the remaining field of general economic history since the organization of the Dominion.

In the introductory chapter, while summarizing the conditions and outlook in 1867, the author emphasizes the point that in Canada the individual has played a less dominant part in shaping the industrial development of the country than in the United States. "Questions of state policy, foreign and domestic, have possessed special significance in the upbuilding of Canada" (p. 96). Partly for this reason the changes in party régime in 1878, 1896, and 1911 have been accepted as dividing points for the periods into which the history has been grouped.

In the first period, from 1867 to 1878, though the great need was for men, the population of the Dominion increased but slowly, many of the